

Clam Lake Elk News [Second Quarter—April through June , 2006]

Current Status: We had 7 confirmed mortalities this quarter, which raised total observed losses for Elk Year 05/06 (20th May 2005 to 20th May 2006) to 20 “observed deaths and increasing observed losses for Elk Year 06/07 (21 May 2006 to May 2007) to 6 “observed deaths” and 8 “projected deaths”. The “projected” loss for Elk Year 05/06 is about 27 animals results in an end of the Elk Year Population Estimate of 96. However, near the end of this quarter we had our 2006 calving season with an estimated 26 calves born resulting in a 122 post calving season population estimate. Deducting the 8 projected mortalities leaves us at 114 elk as of 24 July 2006.

Elk Research on the Clam Lake Herd: Dr. Monica Turner has submitted a research grant proposal to the National Science Foundation to investigate spatial relationships between wolves, white-tailed deer and elk on the Clam Lake Elk Range. This study would include placement of GPS collars on wolves, elk and deer over a 3-4 year period. It's our understanding that Department elk and wolf project staff would assist in capture of study animals (elk and wolves) and provide logistical support to the study. Due to the increasing levels of wolf predation on the Clam Lake herd this research would likely provide useful insights to wolf/elk issues that could improve our elk management.

UW Stevens Point continues to collect elk fecal samples from the Clam Lake elk herd to investigate brain worm and liver fluke parasite impacts. Due to our intensive monitoring of pregnant and birthing cows during this quarter we were able to assist Trina Weiland (UWSP Graduate Student) in collecting over 20 known cow samples and several dozen group samples. At the April 12 RMEF Project Advisory Committee meeting the WI PAC approved next fiscal year's RMEF's cost share for this project.

Elk Health Issues: Mortalities: On April 7, investigating the mortality signal for bull calf 171, Elk Project Staff found its remains on the south shore of the Torch River. It was clear that M171 had been killed and eaten by wolves.

On May 8 and May 11, again investigating mortality signals, bull calves 165 and 167 were discovered the West Fork of the Chippewa River, west and east of the end of Forest Road 709, respectively. Both animals had been killed by wolves.

On May 24 and May 26, current year cow calves 184 and 181 were found to have died, respectively. F184 likely due to scours and F181 due to bear predation. On June 12 and 16 bull calves 198 and 199 were killed and eaten by bears. On June 21, investigating a mortality signal, bull 61 (7 year old bull) was found near the south shore of McCloud Lake, killed and eaten by wolves.

Analyzing our wolf predation investigations its apparent that in addition to the occasional solitary bull being killed more “group” animals are being taken. Most are young animals, not quite a year old, and most of these are killed next to river-ways. One “group” cow was killed in March, however, she had a healed broken hind leg (likely due to a vehicle collision) that made

her vulnerable. If this pattern progresses to sub-adult and adult cows, the Clam Lake herd will be in serious trouble.

Other elk health issues. During this quarter the RMEF PAC approved a \$23 K grant for a special elk crossing warning system that will be activated by elk radio collars as elk approach the STH 77 road right of way (ROW). Motorists will be warned via large informational signs that flashing lights mean that elk have “tripped” the system and motorists need to slow down. We plan on having this system operational prior to November, 2006 (most elk vehicle collisions occur from November through April). Signs and posts have been installed through cooperative efforts with WDOT and Sawyer and Ashland County Highway Departments, and we’re working with Advanced Telemetry Systems and electrical engineers on the final design of the system.

2006 Calving Season: This year project staff monitored 28 cows, searched 24 cows a total of 51 searches, resulting in 20 calves having been found. We found 11 male calves and 9 female calves. As of the end of June we lost 4 of these calves (1 was lost in July). As mentioned above 1 calf likely died of scours (a bacterial dysentery) and 4 due to bear predation (1 on July 17—subsequent quarter). This has been our most successful calf collaring effort to date. This success has been possible through the efforts of WDNR wildlife staff from Hayward, Ladysmith, Spooner, Park Falls, Ashland and Antigo; volunteers from the RMEF, Natural Resources Foundation, and the Clam Lake Community; and staff from UWSP.

Public Education: During this quarter we gave 4 elk presentations to 450 participants. We also gave 4 interviews to reporters from the print media, 4 to radio reporters and 1 for a television program.

Partnerships: We have ongoing partnerships with UWSP, the RMEF, WDOT and US Forest Service. Cooperative efforts with WDNR Conservation Wardens on our “feeding” education and enforcement program are ongoing.

Monitoring: During this quarter we made 1,846 telemetry location determinations and 2,252 telemetry mortality checks (mortality plus locations).

Upcoming Events: During the next quarter we will begin monitoring of the 2006 Elk Mating Season. Bugle Days is scheduled for September 9th and 10th. A planning meeting for the Great Lakes Initiative will be held in Clam Lake on September 12. We hope to make substantial progress on installing the “special elk crossing warning system” by the end of this quarter. Plus, we plan on completion of the No Pi Ming habitat development project by the end of this quarter.

Laine Stowell & Matt McKay, July 28, 2006